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PORTLAND: THE PROBLEMS AND PROMISE OF GROWTH

ERNEST BONNER

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In the City of Portland we have received some complaints that make us want to raise our hands and say "We have got to do something." Many times the response is "Just keep your hands out of it, and it will be all right." In many cases we have something pretty good going, but forces are pressing us. Change is coming, and growth is coming. How do we preserve what is good in the face of that growth and change?

We have an unusual government in the sense that, in theory, it works very poorly. It is called the commission form of government. We have a Mayor and four Council members, all elected at large. The Mayor assigns, by virtue of the Charter, each Council member to certain bureaus and agencies in the city. That is his basic power. One Council member is Commissioner of Parks, another is Commissioner of Police, another is Commissioner of Fire, and Water, and so on. These are doled out—sometimes for political purposes. But the result is that most of the Council has a very firm grasp of how the city operates. It has a kind of moderating influence on the clashes that always go on between political actors about how to run the

city. It does not quiet down the clashes that are personality or politically motivated, but it does a great deal about getting consensus about how the city should operate.

In Portland the Mayor is very strong—not by authority, or by charter, but he is very bright. He is very energetic. He is very much interested in planning. He has supported planning to the hilt, including budgetary support and other types of support. He demands a great deal of us, and that makes a big difference. He knows enough about it to be discriminating. We do not mess around and do things behind his back.

We have a so-called Office of Planning and Development which is a modern-day contrivance designed to make city government more effective and responsive to the citizens. It gathers together the Bureau of Planning, Bureau of Buildings, and Portland Development Commission. It would like to get its hands on the Housing Authority, which is the public housing operation in Portland. I do not think it works, in this particular case. It might seem to work because of the individuals involved, but all it really does is place another layer of bureaucracy between the operating agencies and the people who decide—the Mayor and the Council. I do not think it has worked very well at all, but it is something we put up with. Frankly, it is not that important. Those who established it do not believe in it enough to actually make it work.

I think I should talk a little bit about the organization of the Bureau of Planning—not because it is crucial but because I think it says something in general about how things are for us. When I arrived, there was a staff of about thirty, organized in the following fashion: a director, two assistant directors, eight or nine senior planners, and then all the troops at the lower levels. Over the two and one-half years that I have been in Portland, one of the major accomplishments has been a new organization: a director and four chief planners in the areas of comprehensive planning, program and policy analysis, district planning (or

neighborhood planning), and code administration (which covers zoning, variances, conditional uses, and related issues). The number of people is now 55 total—50 at bottom, 5 at top. We have a budget of about \$1,200,000, which is about \$4,600 a day or \$23,000 per week. Put yourself to a real test some time. Since \$23,000 comes in every week, imagine not meeting the payroll and all those people waiting with their kids at home. What is coming in and what is going out? Think about it like that sometime. I do. It is not very encouraging.

What have we been doing? Since I have been here, we have been working on four neighborhood plans: one is just about to be adopted totally—plans, zoning and capital improvements—and three others are in various stages along the way. The second has been through the Planning Commission and is going before the Council this month. The third has not been before the Planning Commission yet, but it will be in two to three months. The fourth has been through the Planning Commission and is about ready to go before the Council. Three years ago all those plans were sitting around the table; today one is almost completed and the other three will be completed before the end of this fiscal year.

One of the things that has been a problem is that there has been a lot of rezoning. Dealing with zoning ordinances is very trying. It affects everybody over a wide area. It affects the value of their property, which is what people consider the last bastion of their rights. Usually rezoning takes a lot of time and causes friction and a lot of trouble. Many neighborhood plans involve zoning trouble; in fact, many times zoning is what neighborhoods want. Neighborhoods want us to pay attention to getting the zoning fixed up so that apartments cannot come in. Then they want us to get the traffic off the streets, and they would also, incidentally, like to have the dogs stop barking.

We have also completed the downtown plan in terms of the plan itself. We have development regulations that are

{ just about adopted by the Council. It is a matter of process now covering height, density, use, parking, and a special set of regulations for the downtown retail core designed to make that core competitive with regional shopping centers.

We have done the usual kinds of things with codes. Believe it or not, we do not have subdivision regulations in the City of Portland. We have not had them for many years. We are now in the Council with a proposed set of subdivision regulations, and they should be approved in three months. We do not have the planning and development regulations that most cities do. This is interesting about the City of Portland because it has been this way ever since they have had planning. We have had growth pressures to subdivide land, and it is interesting that we do not have regulations to govern it.

We spent a great deal of time in my early months at the Bureau of Planning with a freeway that was slated to go through the southeast of Portland, ripping out 1% of the city's housing stock, 5,000 people, and going nowhere and doing nothing except justifying another freeway, which we were not too sure about either. We spent a great deal of time with the Council fighting that freeway and then subsequently getting that freeway money turned into transit money. Last week the Council adopted a program of some \$250 million in expenditures on transit projects, and it is just a matter of time before we start turning dirt on these projects. The interesting thing about that is that the freeway itself, which went through the southeast, is now being replaced by about \$150 million worth of expenditures in the southeast. An additional \$150 million will be spent on transportation improvements throughout the region. Politically, the transfer of that money from that freeway to transit projects is one of the best things that ever happened to us. It gave us the money to fund a lot of smaller projects that we needed much more than that freeway. In the end we will have made \$225 million, and of that, \$350 million will be in transit expenditures. Some of them will

be very small--trying to redesign and reconstruct a street so that it works better for buses and transit vehicles. That transportation effort has been a very successful part of what we have done in Portland.

A couple of things in zoning were fundamental yet controversial. We changed the definition of *family* in our zoning ordinance to say that the family can be up to five unrelated individuals. This permits people who are not married to one another to live in single-family residential areas. We also changed a residential care facilities ordinance. This was an ordinance setting forth rules whereby social service facilities, which must be in a residential area (in a residential unit), can legitimately be in that area. Both of these affected several neighborhoods that were dead set against both of these particular programs. The neighborhoods may eventually win out. Needless to say, we relate the capital improvements program and the general kinds of things that one would do in the planning program to these proposals and others.

What does planning do? I have spent three years in the City of Portland, and we still have to get going on our comprehensive plan. This tells something about where comprehensive planning is in the stream of things--about nowhere. My own particular feeling about the situation is that it should stay nowhere. In the City of Portland, if we are to maintain some semblance of the quality of life that we have, it is going to be by understanding the forces of change and by designing the kinds of responses that will assure us that the right things are happening. We are going to grow by probably 50% in the region over the next fifteen years. In the City of Portland itself, we are going to grow by 50,000 to 60,000 people, and I think that is a conservative estimate. We are not going to keep what we have by sitting around and hoping that 50,000 or 60,000 new people will not have cars; or by hoping that some 450,000 people in the city will not have kids to send to school; or that they will not do this or do that; we cannot

hope that they will not demand space and accommodations not only in their own living rooms, but also in the places where they work. Nor can we hope they will not want to drive to work in such a way that it sets demands that are impossible to meet. We will not get there by continuing to put our heads in the sand about things—for example, why do we all have to continue to go to work at the same time and do everything else at the same time? This is causing one of our most serious problems; we constantly have to design for peak hour situations rather than tolerate some congestion.

Less is enough is really where it is at. We have to get people to say that and to take upon themselves to accept that kind of response. It is very much like comprehensive planning. Comprehensive planners are like the Hare Krishna. Have you ever encountered one in the airport? They want to sell you a book. They want you to know the light. They want you to see God and Truth, and all that. If you ever walk by one of them you get an idea how people could walk by you as a planner. What will happen to us in twenty years if we do not have a plan? People could look to the comprehensive planner for the answer—but we do not know it.

I believe in it, which is not to say I think it is the greatest thing since long underwear. I believe in it, and my role is partly to do comprehensive planning for the City of Portland, and so I will do it. Yet I do wonder about it all.

Let me talk about some of the basic things that we enter into when we start thinking about the comprehensive plan, what we are doing for it, and the things that occur to me about it. The first thing is that I think we have to turn it around to a situation where we say "Let us help people help themselves." This means we do not set Utopian goals and we do not decide what is right. We do not do anything like that. We simply give people the information and the tools they need to do something on their own. If they do not do it, that is the way it goes. If they do it, that is fine, and so there is no further judgment that we can make about it. Perhaps that is the extreme of it.

As a public society, we are accepting more and more responsibility when we should be taking on less. We are not capable of discharging that responsibility, and we never were. We kid ourselves to think we can. Individuals kid themselves to think that the public will take responsibility for something they should do. Families who do not take care of their elderly mother and father are not going to survive. The family unit is disintegrating, and all the things that the family did are now being accepted by—guess who. We cannot, we will not, and we say we do not want to, yet we accept these problems as public responsibilities. When we decide that we are going to do something for somebody, we set up a whole group of things that are a lot of mischief—for example, what they should have, how we should go about it, what are our public interest goals and objectives, and other things like that. We are doing all of that in the comprehensive plan.

I have not said anything about goals and objectives because I do not think I believe in them any more. They are going to get us in the end. There is a long drawn-out process where everybody sits around, raps, and has big town meetings and even TV meetings; this includes politicians, the League of Women Voters, neighborhood groups, and so on. Guess what they concoct—nothing. That is what we get from a long set of discussions about goals and objectives. Nothing. Why would we not get that? Everybody has to be satisfied in that process. What we end up with is something that does not discriminate at all. We do not get any direction between right and wrong or good and bad. We get gobbledygook. We just cannot get anything more than that. We cannot ask a deliberative body to come to any kind of a hard decision in that abstraction. We can ask them to make hard decisions in specific situations, but we never will get them into a corner where they will say "we are going to do this or that or the other thing." They will not do it—consistently.

I would like to return to this idea that less is enough. Small is OK. The big public spending programs of the past were a delusion for us all. I think they did not do anything except convince me that we were into things that were too complex for

{ for any of us to understand. We did not understand them then; we do not understand them yet; and I do not think we will ever understand the complex system we were trying to deal with in big bold terms. Although anyone can see that the world did not fall apart, and we are still here, I do not think it was a good thing to be doing—nor were we successful.

Much of what we are doing in the City of Portland is in the nature of taking the risk out of investment and emphasizing the role of private investment in this whole game. The emphasis has got to be on private investment, not public, and that emphasis is taking the risk out of investment. If we stop to think about it, that is what has been happening all along. What is a subsidy but taking the risk out of investment? Then one might say, but for whom? The big emphasis in the comprehensive plan in the City of Portland will be on the neighborhoods and taking the risk out of investment in those neighborhoods by private individuals. This must be because private investment of time and money is going to be what saves them. If we do not have that, we can go home and forget it. If we do not get that, we have nothing, because there is not enough publicly gathered money in this world to do the kinds of things that a group of private individuals can do. So there is going to be a big emphasis on that.

Another thing is to start where people are, not where we want them to be in planning. Start where they are at a simple level. In this period of competition for people's interest we have to communicate with them. We have a sheet that talks about streets. It starts talking about streets by talking about front yards. Between your house and the street is your front yard, and that is how it starts. I really think that is where we have to be.

There will be an emphasis on neighborhoods and the whole relationship to the comprehensive plan for the City of Portland. It starts with a map that shows your house, on your lot, on your street. That is where we start. It does not start with a rap about a bar chart that shows the varied uses of energy. It does not start with a map of a regional transportation system.

It does not start with a discussion about how we control the use of land. It starts with your house, your lot, and your street. When we get there, then we can begin to get people interested. That is where they are interested, and sometimes we can get them to take as wide a vantage point as their whole neighborhood. Sometimes, among those people who are interested in their whole neighborhood, there will be a few who might even be interested in how their neighborhood fits in with all the other neighborhoods in the city. But we will not get them there without taking them from the beginning. If anything has been brought home to me, again and again, it is start where the people are, not where we want them to be. When we talk about getting them in the buses, do not talk about getting them in the buses. They have to get into the buses in their own way.

There is nothing that is so complex that it cannot be stated very simply. That seems fairly simple, but it is really hard to press. As a matter of fact, it is hard for me to get that acceptance out of the people who work for me. After we had our northwest district plan—which is the district in Portland that contains the most articulate and most responsible neighborhood organizations—and the plan was in the Council, we took the Council on a field trip. A guy from the television station came up and asked what the northwest district plan was all about. I started to tell him, and I could have gone on and on. He said "Have you got a one-liner?" Think about things in that way, because 25 years in the lives of a lot of people could be really one-liners. Some things that people spend their whole life with, you want in terms of one line. That is about as much as you are interested in, and maybe that is about as much as is important to you. At any rate, the one line is what gets on the television—at best a twenty-second spot. Put everything you have to say that is really important into twenty seconds. Get down to the important part, and get the rest off to the side.

Finally, I wonder whether or not planning could be a little more democratic. The first thing is, it is not planning, it is

(decision-making. It is not producing a plan, it is getting decisions made in such a way that something is assured for our children and grandchildren. Could those decisions be made more democratically? I do not know. I do not even know if they should be. But I think what we are going to try in Portland is to push to the extremes and to try to make planning more and more democratic. I am not convinced that it will result in any kind of better decisions. But it is kind of a test for planning in Portland.

QUESTION: Where are you putting the cars? You have taken out freeways, and you have taken out streets.

RESPONSE: I will be you that in the City of Milwaukee and the City of Portland it is the same thing. There are some streets that have less traffic on them right now than 25 years ago, particularly because the interstate system is there now. It is really interesting that to justify the interstate we show the reduction of traffic on the other streets, but we never do anything physically to the other streets. We could. The interstate highway had reduced the function of one street to that of serving a few special interests, mainly truckers going between two industrial districts. They molded a campaign to prevent the closing. Ultimately the head of our transportation commission and the chairman of the board of the power company said no. We have studies that show it hardly makes any difference.

Since that time, we have taken one ramp off the bridge; we are going to take two more ramps off bridges leading to the front avenue; we are squeezing down seven to four lanes. All of the original plans were just ridiculous. All of these plans had been justified in terms of traffic counts, but by and large it is a twenty minute a day problem.

The perception we have is that we want that land along the river for parks, and it does not leave much room for cars. It was the end of a 45-year effort by citizens groups, not the city, not the engineer, not the Council, not the Mayor, not

the Planning Bureau, but by citizen groups that recreated themselves every ten years. They kept that issue alive until we got that combination; the need for a park and the Mayor coming together. A lot of that happens. Citizens keep after it. They were not your down-home citizens, they were very influential, but they kept at it.

Q: I get the impression that Portland has nothing in common with other cities like Detroit, Kansas City, and so on. What is wrong with Portland?

R: That may be right. I guess one of the things that is absolutely crucial in understanding this is that the practice of planning that we are going through is put in terms of our bureau and how we go about our day-to-day business. That is not very much different in any city. We have zoning, and we have a section that works on transportation planning, and we have a section that does neighborhood planning, and so forth. Many cities have the same kind of institutions, but nothing else is the same.

The attitude and approach that the Bureau of Planning has in the City of Portland is different from others. It is different because the Mayor of Portland is different. The Council is different. It is a commission form. The city itself is different. These are important differences. The distribution or income of the population of the City of Portland is not very different from the region. The distribution by occupation is in *favor* of the city. The city has a greater percentage of higher income, white-collar occupations than the region as a whole. The city has open land and we are still annexing. Another thing is that Portland is young, yet we already have 1,100,000 in the urban region and we are getting a little bit bigger. The cost of inflation is helping us, because it is keeping the relative costs of city versus suburbs more in our favor than before. The interstate is helping us. The cost of living is going to help us. We are just young, and we have not had the chance to make a lot of mistakes yet.

Q: Does Portland work on more than a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. basis in the downtown area or is there a daily population?

R: No, not significantly so. We have some residential areas that are still strong downtown. Development regulations provide for some exclusive residential zoning so we have to build housing in those areas. I think over the next two decades that will make a difference, and we will build up some housing, but it is tough now. We are getting a few new housing interests but not too many.

Basically we do not stay alive much after 6 p.m., except on Friday nights when the kids from every high school in the state come to town. The interesting thing is how we get something started downtown. We have a policy on downtown streets. It says that on a certain street pedestrians have equal if not higher rank than other things. It means that there cannot be an access to a parking garage or a lot on that street. We cannot cut across it. It means that the community development money, as well as the tax income and urban renewal money, is going to be spent to make it a different physical thing. The sidewalks are expanding out, and the streets are going to be squeezed. Cars can go on it, but it is going to be definitely a pedestrian street, and that will be accomplished.

What is interesting about this is that once the city made that decision three years ago, that Council action meant that a tremendous number of private decisions would have to be based on that policy. The city cannot turn around that policy decision. Major new retailers have located on that street for that purpose. Now they are hollering, "When are you going to improve the street?" We have to rush to get the improvement plans.

The downtown plan started as a kind of a citizens effort among the people who were in the downtown. These were basically the retailers who had the most to lose. They started the plan in 1969 with their own private money. They got a downtown plan together, and they presented it to the Council. The Council finally set some guidelines. Since that

time, we have been proposing boundaries, development regulations, specific development plans, and programs. All along it has been a private constituency wanting it with the capacity to swing it politically and enough effort to get things done.

My impression of the downtown is that it is quite large. It is difficult to make some sense out of it, but the downtown plan for Portland has some very simple and clear policies—for example, a park around the waterfront, intersecting pedestrian ways, housing, and pedestrian streets. These are very simple straightforward concepts. Now we have results.

Q: What are Portland's biggest problems?

R: We have a growing problem with police and fire unions. We do not have enough garbage collectors or street cleaners. They are becoming more and more political and nonprofessional and more and more grabby. So that is a serious problem. I think we have a serious problem in our basic fiscal capacity. It can be seen when costs go up by 8% to 10%, yet the fiscal base remains relatively fixed. I think we have a growing social problem, not so much in terms of race, but in the high schools and the junior highs. There is a racial problem. It is not severe because we have a very small minority population.

Q: Did you really mean to say that you do not believe in setting goals and objectives?

R: Yes! We could spend hours going over every one. Do we want to maintain it or do we want to improve it? Improve or enhance? Maintain or enhance? Maintain and improve? We come up with these words, and everybody who suspects there is something important about it will be there long enough to knock out anything that might threaten them. The result of all that, after many months—if not years—is nothing because there is not a single thing that can be said about anything

that will satisfy everybody. It happened to our downtown plan. Goals and guidelines were established, and, with the exception of those major concepts that everyone likes, all the rest is just garbage.

People come in and want to do the most awful things: Burger Kings in the downtown, filling stations, car washes. They come in and they say it meets the downtown goals in these ways. There is this and this. Yes, but what about this and this? There is something in it for everybody. There has to be. So why do it? What I think we should do is bring them into a process that makes them in effect a constructive force in decisions.

Q: What about district plans? Do they have to be approved by each district?

R: The district plans largely emanate out of the district associations. There is a lot, maybe too much, input from them. I think that there is more than enough participation, in all phases of government. This includes capital budgeting, planning, and the regular operating budget. The Mayor is very much into giving people what they need on their own behalf.

QUESTIONER'S RESPONSE: That is what it appears to be!

ST. PAUL: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND TIMING OF PLANNING

DONALD L. SPAID, AIP

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I would like to talk about how planning has evolved in the City of St. Paul, Minnesota. I am going to bore you a little with a rather long background of how it got to where it is today because I think it is important. It is very difficult to view planning in St. Paul without knowing some of the context. Minnesota, as can be learned from different papers and the general public relations documents that have come out, has a strong orientation to professionalism. As far as I can determine, this started back around the turn of the century through a grant endowment that was left to the University of Minnesota in order to educate and train people to be government servants and to deal with government in a professional manner. The final offshoot of it today is the School of Management and Environmental Affairs, and this has created a host of people in Minnesota that have, in essence, been trained to be government employees. It has created a quality of government that I find mostly unsurpassed in the United States.

We do things well. This is not just in St. Paul; this is in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Now I imagine everybody who talks in this series will say we do things well, but I mean